

Foundations: Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers

WHAT IS *FOUNDATIONS*?

Foundations: Early Learning Standards for North Carolina Preschoolers and Strategies for Guiding Their Success is an important book that provides early learning standards for children ages three, four and pre-k five. *Foundations* is a guide for teachers, administrators, families or any adult working with preschool children in North Carolina.

The book contains:

- Guiding principles that state the values, beliefs and knowledge base that informed the creation of *Foundations*.
- A set of early learning standards that are “widely held expectations” for the learning and development of three-, four- and pre-k five-year-old children. The expectations define *what children should have the opportunity to learn*.
- Strategies for early childhood educators and families for fostering children’s experiences needed to achieve the widely held expectations.

The early learning standards and strategies cover all five developmental domains: approaches to learning, emotional and social development, health and physical development, language development and communication, and cognitive development.

Over fifty of North Carolina’s early care and education leaders worked together from 2002 through 2004 to research and agree upon early learning standards for our state and to develop the *Foundations* book. *Foundations* was reviewed by local focus groups and by state and national experts in each developmental domain and across all domains, to ensure that the early learning standards reflect the most current child development knowledge. *Foundations* was endorsed by the State Board of Education, the Division of Child Development and the Governor’s Office in 2004.

To obtain a copy of *Foundations* and for more information, visit the web site www.ncprek.nc.gov.



WHY DID NORTH CAROLINA CREATE *FOUNDATIONS*?

While North Carolina has long been a leader in high-quality early care and education, the development of *Foundations* marks the first time our state defined common developmental priorities for preschoolers that are directly aligned to benchmarks in the NC Standard Course of Study for Kindergarten. These leaders developed *Foundations* to:

- Promote development of the whole child across all developmental domains
- Provide a common set of expectations for preschool children’s development and, at the same time, validate individual differences
- Promote shared responsibility for children’s care and education, encouraging family and community participation
- Emphasize the importance of hands-on learning
- Support clean, safe and caring indoor and outdoor early learning environments
- Reflect and value the cultural, linguistic and ability diversity of our state’s preschool children.

HOW TO USE *FOUNDATIONS* TO PROMOTE QUALITY

First, adults need to understand “convergent abilities” and “divergent abilities” when implementing developmentally appropriate practice to help all children learn, grow and develop. We know from child development research that convergent abilities are the general developmental milestones children often reach and demonstrate. The widely held expectations in *Foundations* are convergent abilities. Divergent abilities, on the other hand, are the individual differences each child might demonstrate on any given day based on experiences, temperament, interests, culture, family priorities and individual variation in development. All children typically show divergence from widely held expectations or general developmental outcomes in some areas.

Since child development is an ongoing journey, *Foundations* should be used as a guidebook to what is developmentally appropriate and expected for three-, four-, and pre-k five-year-old children. The widely held expectations listed in *Foundations* are broad descriptions of expected behaviors that will emerge and be observed with increasing consistency during the preschool period. Each widely held expectation, however, begins with the words “children begin to” to honor the variability in the development of each preschool child.

Early childhood educators should also use *Foundations* as a lens to examine curricula, everyday activities, experiences, projects and the indoor and outdoor learning environments to ensure that their program is:

- Addressing the whole child
- Expecting children to behave in ways that are developmentally appropriate
- Helping a child to be ready for kindergarten by following *Foundations*, which leads to the NC Standard Course of Study for Kindergarten.

CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER TOOLS TO SUPPORT QUALITY

Foundations gives us the starting point – the child – so that we, as early childhood educators, can effectively use tools that promote quality early childhood programs. These tools include: facility licensure requirements, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R) and curricula. How does *Foundations* connect with these tools to support quality in the indoor and outdoor learning environments? A preschool teacher, for example, may have concerns about behavior among the children in her class. She often observes children hitting one another to get what they want. To help with this situation, the teacher considers:

- **Foundations** – There are 24 widely held expectations in the emotional and social domain in *Foundations* that help the teacher know he is “on track” with his expectations and gives him ideas for targeting behaviors and skills to help children behave appropriately.
- **Environment** – The ECERS-R helps the teacher assess how the indoor and outdoor learning environments (space, time and materials) support the children in developing social and emotional skills. The teacher can look around the indoor and outdoor learning environments to determine if there are enough interesting choices for children, adequate materials, and adequate time for children to use the materials. The teacher can also evaluate the quality of her supportive presence to help children learn to negotiate disputes during play.
- **Curriculum** – Through the curriculum, the teacher discovers in more detail the developmental stages children go through in developing appropriate emotional and social abilities. The curriculum provides ideas for materials, strategies, interactions and information to share with families to help children increase their emotional and social skills.





REMEMBER THE “Cs” IN USING *FOUNDATIONS*

- Know the **Content** to be familiar with North Carolina’s priorities for child outcomes, teaching strategies, values and beliefs for early care and education
- Use as a **Curricular** support to determine if a curriculum is addressing all of North Carolina’s priorities and to link to the NC Standard Course of Study for Kindergarten
- **Connect** curricula, environmental assessments, and licensure standards to create high-quality indoor and outdoor learning environments to help children achieve the widely held expectations
- **Communicate** the widely held expectations to everyone, including families, elementary school personnel and community members helping children to learn and develop.

FOUNDATIONS ONLINE

Training in *Foundations* is available online at www.ncprek.nc.gov. The training is free.

Features of the *Foundations* Online Training Tool include:

- How *Foundations* connects to child care regulations, curricula, and the NC Standard Course of Study;
- How you can use developmentally appropriate and effective practices every day;
- How to support high-quality early childhood learning environments and activities;
- How to use *Foundations* in daily planning; and
- Where to find information, research and resources to extend your learning beyond *Foundations* and improve your teaching practices.

The purpose of the *Foundations* Online Training Tool is to provide information about North Carolina’s early learning standards in an easy to use, electronic format to early educators, families and providers of professional development and technical assistance.

Users may start and stop their participation in this online workshop at any time. It is recommended that the training be completed over a period of 1 to 2 weeks to provide the time needed to read and consider the content, try out strategies with young children, and reflect on your practice. Users who read and complete all activities in all of the modules and send in the final activity are eligible to receive a certificate of completion, NC Division of Child Development (DCD) contact hours, and the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) CEUs.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- Kirk, S., Gallagher, J. & Anastasiow, N. (2003). *Educating Exceptional Children*. Tenth Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Copple, C. & Bredekamp, S. (2006). *Basics of Developmentally Appropriate Practice*. Washington, DC: NAEYC
- Harms, T., Clifford, R., & Cryer, D. (2005). *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition*. New York: Teachers College Press